

## Was It Worth It by MicrosuedeMouse

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**Summary:**

Nancy needs to be around someone who doesn't require explanations. Jonathan does his best. When conversation turns to Steve, he can't help asking why she's still with him. And it opens a wound.

## Was It Worth It

### Author's Note:

Wrote this like a week ago when there were only four ST fics up, but didn't get a chance to edit until today. Gonna post one more as well, then I have to wake up in like five hours to go away for the week. Will probably write more while I'm away, so keep your eyes peeled if you enjoy this. (:

Jonathan barely moved from his desk when he heard a knock at the bedroom door. Thinking his mom had forgotten something on her way out to work, he just said, "Come in."

The door opened slowly, and Jonathan glanced up when he heard a small, hesitant sound. "Oh!" he said, surprised. "Nancy!" He jumped to his feet.

She looked worried. "Um, I got here just as your mom was leaving, she said you'd be in here..."

"Yeah, um, what's up?" he asked. Looking at her expression, he added, "Are you okay?"

"I guess," she answered softly, looking like it was almost a strain to find the right words. "I just, um... You know, I can't always..." Biting her lip, she put a hand over her eyes.

Uncertain what to do, Jonathan took a couple steps towards her. "Why don't we go sit down," he suggested, putting his arm around her back as if to lead her, but hovering instead of making contact. She nodded a little and let him take her to the living room, barely touching her as he walked.

They sat down on the couch, and he was quiet for a moment, letting her compose herself. She took her hand away from her face, drew a few deep breaths, finally looked up at him. He was watching her attentively, waiting for her to be ready to speak.

"Sometimes I feel like I just need to talk to someone, or be around someone, who saw what I saw," Nancy finally managed, her gaze drifting back to her hands in her lap.

Jonathan nodded. "That makes sense."

"I just..." She took another long breath. "You can't just forget all of that. That horrible creature, that awful place I went, everything we did... I keep remembering the deer. It's seared into my brain. I try to focus on something else and suddenly there it is, so vividly... Just lying there, dying, and we tried to help it, but then the way it was dragged away from us..."

He nodded. "I know. None of us will ever be able to forget everything that happened. I think we can all see it in each other, too. Sometimes Will gets this haunted look in his eyes... he tries not to let us see, but I know he's thinking of that other place."

"I can't imagine what it must be like for him," she said quietly. "He was there for so long. I was only there for a few minutes... but I dream about it all the time."

"I'm sorry," Jonathan said earnestly. "That I wasn't there with you when you found it, to... I don't know, whether to go in with you or hold you back. Sorry that I barely even helped you out of there. Sorry that you had to see it and I didn't."

Gingerly, she touched his fingers on the couch cushion between them. She didn't quite take his hand, but just left her fingers next to his, a few of them lightly overlapping his own. "Thank you for what you did, though."

He made to say something, stopped, hesitated a moment. Then, softly, "Why did you come to me? So many people were involved..."

Nancy shrugged a little. "You shared the most with me in those few days. Out of everyone, you saw the most of what I saw. I don't have to explain any of it to you. You already know."

Jonathan nodded. "Okay," he answered, understanding, but unsure what else to say.

They were quiet for a moment, and then Nancy sighed. "This is so much easier with you."

"Than who?" he asked.

"Than Steve, mostly," she answered, looking down. "He tries really hard. He did see *some* of it, saw the monster. But he only half-understands. He'll listen when I try to explain, but so much of the time I don't *want* to explain. I just want to... cry. Or sit. And just be comforted."

Uncertain, Jonathan murmured, "You can cry if you need to."

He wasn't sure if she heard him, because she rolled straight into something else, apparently needing this opportunity to vent. "He's so frustrating sometimes. He's a good guy and he tries so hard. He's working to make up for everything he did wrong. He's not talking to Tommy or Carol any more... but sometimes he still slips back into old habits. He'll say something snide or dismissive or mean. Sometimes he catches himself, sometimes he doesn't. I know he's trying, but seeing that slip out of him... it's ugly. I think he played that role for so long that it became a part of him, and he's not having an easy time getting rid of it." Her hands balled tightly into fists.

There was a pause while Jonathan waited a moment to make sure she was done. "You've had a lot on your mind, huh?"

She nodded, frowning deeply. "Guess so."

He bit his lip. "Can I ask a question? You don't have to answer."

She nodded again.

Jonathan hesitated. Then, quietly, "Why are you still dating him?"

She looked up at him from the corner of her eye, a rueful half-smile on her face now. "You still don't like him very much, do you?"

He ducked his head and looked away, thinking for a couple seconds. "I respect him," he answered slowly. "He saved my life, even though I think that had a lot more to do with you than me. And he apologized for what he said about Will, and my family. But I don't like him. He's

been a jerk to me for a really long time and that's not something I can just forgive. And I don't think I have to."

Nancy shrugged. "You're not wrong."

Jonathan stared at the floor, wondering if she was going to answer his question, feeling guilty for even asking it. It wasn't his business, no matter what he wanted.

"I guess I just... needed something to feel like it hadn't changed." He looked back up at her as her voice broke. She was sinking forward, her fingers abandoning his as she put her face in her hands, her elbows resting on her knees. "Everything is so different, and I had to feel like something was still the same. My brother is grieving... he thinks he hides it, but I can see. Just like you said about Will. All the boys are hurting without Eleven. And your mom... and Chief Hopper. Every time any of us see each other, we exchange that look... we all know what happened, and that we can't talk about it, and that we can never forget it. I have nightmares all the time. And..." She stifled a sob. "And Barb..." Her shoulders shook.

Jonathan swallowed hard and ignored his nerves, moving close to her and wrapping an arm around her shoulders.

"I can never shake the feeling that it was all my fault," Nancy wept. "I lost my best friend because of a boy. She wanted to go and I wanted to stay with Steve and I told her to just leave without me, and she cared too much about me to just go home. So she sat outside with that stupid bleeding thumb, that was my fault, too, and that *thing* showed up and..." She couldn't say the words, but Jonathan knew what they were. "...All while I was up in Steve's room, being stupid and selfish..." She sobbed again. "I can't even tell her mother what happened. We can't have a funeral. I can't find her at school and suck up to her because she's mad at me and then offer her a girls' weekend to make up for blowing her off... I can't..."

Jonathan hated that he had opened this wound, and could only hope that talking about it was somehow cathartic for her. He squeezed her shoulders, rubbed her arm gently as she leaned into him. His own anxieties were far outweighed by her need for contact. For a few moments they just sat there, Nancy crying, Jonathan doing his best to

comfort her.

“What if the boy wasn’t even *worth* it?” she asked despondently, and finally Jonathan really grasped the depth of Nancy’s grief and the reasoning behind her choices in the last month and a half.

“I’m so sorry,” he murmured, hugging her shoulders tightly. She turned towards him, putting her arms around his shoulders and her face against his neck. He was a little taken aback, but he put both arms around her and rubbed her back gently.

They were quiet for a while, Nancy slowly calming down, Jonathan a little unsure what was happening but trying to be what she needed. Eventually she pulled away from him, not meeting his eyes.

“Is everything all right?” he asked.

She shrugged and sighed. “Not really,” she admitted. “But maybe eventually it will be.”

“Are you okay for today?” he tried, pushing for any confirmation that she was feeling at least a little better.

“I guess so.” She looked at the clock on the wall. “I should get home.”

“Let me drive you,” he suggested.

“Oh, no, it’s fine,” she said, shaking her head. “It’s not that cold, I don’t mind the walk.”

“No, I have to pick Will up from Lucas’s house soon anyway,” he insisted, getting to his feet. “Just let me get my coat.”

The drive was fairly quiet, scattered with a few comments about the weather or the traffic. To Jonathan it seemed like there was a kind of tension hanging between them, but he didn’t know what it was or whether Nancy felt it too. After a while they pulled into the Wheelers’ driveway.

“Thank you,” Nancy said softly.

“Yeah, like I said, it’s no problem,” Jonathan replied awkwardly,

tapping the steering wheel, but he glanced over and saw her watching him.

“No, I mean, for everything,” she clarified, giving him a meaningful look.

“Um, you’re welcome,” he answered quietly. He couldn’t look away from her face as she regarded him thoughtfully for a moment. When suddenly she leaned towards him, he pulled back.

She looked at him in surprise and concern, fearing she’d misjudged. “You don’t want me to...?”

“I-I mean, not right now,” he stammered. “You’re with Steve.”

She smiled a little despite herself. “But maybe under different circumstances?”

He didn’t know how to answer that, but his expression said it all. She looked down, her smile growing.

“Well, maybe those circumstances will come up sometime soon,” she said softly. “You’ve certainly got me thinking, at least.”

Jonathan still didn’t quite know how to react, or whether he correctly understood her implication. Gently she took hold of his coat collar and tugged him forward, kissing him softly on the cheek just like she’d done a few weeks earlier.

“Thanks again,” she said, smiling at the face he was making. “I really appreciate it. It’s good to know you’re around to talk when I need it.” She got out of the car.

He rested his hands on the steering wheel, watching Nancy stroll up the driveway and into her house. He drummed his fingers for a moment after she disappeared inside, thinking. Then he smiled a little and got out of the car himself to go next door for his brother.